

CALIFORNIA STATE-FEDERAL JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Public Confidence in the Judiciary Subcommittee

Report on Public Education and Community Outreach Programs in California Courts (April 2007)

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Public Education and Community Outreach Programs in California Courts

In 1999, the Judicial Council of California distributed a how-to resource guide to all presiding judges and executive officers in California Courts:

<http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/community/handbook.htm>

The guide made recommendations to aid courts in developing court and community collaboration programs. The following information highlights some of the public education and community outreach programs that have since been developed by state and federal courts in California. Below are summaries of that various programs in California courts and links to some of the most helpful websites.

Public Education and Community Outreach Categories

- Online Programs
- Citizen Advisory Committees
- Court Sessions in the Schools
- Education and Training Programs
- Public Awareness Programs
- Self-Help Materials
- Speakers Bureaus
- Volunteer Programs
- Court Tours

Examples of Public Education Efforts Across the State

Online Programs

- Glenn County Superior Court has a website with “Resources for Teachers.” The website provides links and lesson plans for teachers and students alike.
http://www.glenncourt.ca.gov/general_info/teachers/index.html
- Kern County Superior Court’s website has an “E-mail Suggestion Box” that permits community members to give input on improving the courtroom experience.
<http://www.kern.courts.ca.gov/email.asp>
- Los Angeles County Superior Court’s website offers a virtual courthouse tour in several languages. The interactive site explains the roles of judicial officers and introduces the public to the courtroom experience.
<http://www.lasuperiorcourt.org/court2000old/court.htm>
- Napa County Superior Court provides a website with lesson plans specifically targeted for grades three to five.
<http://www.napa.courts.ca.gov/teacher/index.html>
- Orange County Superior Court offers an online “Student Resource Center.” The website offers interactive games, puzzles, video presentations and lessons that help the community better understand court processes.
<http://education.occourts.org/home.asp>

- The California Courts Website has a page dedicated to a “Day in the Life of the Courts.” The site offers visual images and brief descriptions meant to provide an introduction to the daily activities of a California Superior Court. Included on the site are tours of the Superior Courts of the following counties: El Dorado, Orange, Fresno, Butte, Riverside, and Alameda.
<http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courts/>

Citizen Advisory Committees

- Riverside County Superior Court has a “Court-Community Planning Committee” that consists of judges, bar leaders, educators, and community representatives. The committee oversees and develops community outreach programs for the court.
<http://www.courts.co.riverside.ca.us/comfocus/comreach.htm>
- Sacramento County Superior Court held a “Community-Based Organizations Court Training” that brought together 54 participants from different community-based organizations to educate them about the courts and to receive input on improving court services.
http://www.saccourt.com/geninfo/News_Media/Docs/rhd%20CBO%20Training%20%2006.pdf
- San Joaquin County Superior Court created a “Community-Focused Planning Team” that brings together judicial officers and community members to serve as an advisory body to the court. The Team assists the Superior Court in its community related programs and provides community input for implementing the court’s Long-Range Strategic Plan.
<http://www.stocktoncourt.org/courts/comfocus3.htm>
- Siskiyou County Superior Court held twelve focus group meetings in 2001 as part of their “Public Education Brochure Project.” At the meetings, members of the public expressed concerns about court processes. In response, court and community leaders worked together to create a public education brochure that explains court processes using everyday language and visual storytelling.
<http://www.siskiyou.courts.ca.gov/Page.asp?NavID=453>
- Since 1994, Tulare County Superior Court has conducted regular meetings of a “Domestic Violence Task Force.” The Task Force asks community members and agencies to participate in regular meetings to address domestic violence issues in the county.
<http://www.tularesuperiorcourt.ca.gov/DVTaskforce/MissionStatement.htm>

Court Sessions in the Schools

- The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals participates in the federal judiciary’s educational outreach program called “Courts to Classes.” The cornerstone of the program is the “Open Doors to Federal Courts” initiative aimed at educating high school students about the federal judiciary through courtroom simulations of a fictional case.
<http://www.uscourts.gov/outreach/programs/opendoors.htm>
- The Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Two, held oral arguments at a local high school for students throughout Inyo County. After the oral argument, the justices visited classrooms along with other Inyo County judges and lawyers. An estimated 900 – 1,200 high school students participated.
<http://www.inyocourt.ca.gov/CPC-108.pdf>

- San Joaquin County Superior Court runs a Courtroom to Schoolroom program called “Choices \$ Consequences: Know the Truth.” In conjunction with the California Office of Traffic Safety, the program conducts actual DUI sentencing hearings in local area schools. The program is oriented towards the 8th – 10th grades.
<http://www.stocktoncourt.org/courts/choices.htm>
- Fresno County Superior Court offers a “Keep Kids in School” program, known as KKIS. KKIS is an aggressive early intervention program designed to deal with truancy. It consists of two primary components: 1) intervention at the elementary school level and 2) intervention at the secondary school level.
http://www.fresnosuperiorcourt.org/general_info/award_winning.php#kkis
- Los Angeles County Superior Court has an award-winning educational “First Impressions Project” in which the court arranges field trips and classroom visits by attorneys.
<http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/documents/inclass.pdf>
- San Joaquin County Superior Court also has a “First Impressions” program. A team consisting of a judge, prosecutor, and defense attorney teach one class session per week for five to seven weeks to each participating 5th grade class. The highlight of the program is a mock trial done by each class at the Superior Court. The mock trial involves the trial of the Big Bad Wolf for the “homicide” of two of the three Pig Brothers.
<http://www.stocktoncourt.org/courts/comfocus6.htm>
- Santa Clara County Superior Court held an actual DUI trial at San Jose State University. Held before about 150 students, the trial was followed by a presentation and interactive discussion session conducted by a Superior Court Judge.
http://www.sccsuperiorcourt.org/news/PDFs/SJSU_DUI_trial.pdf

Education and Training Programs

- The U.S. District Court for the Central District of California hosts an annual “Groundhog Job Shadow Day.” The event pairs students from local schools with employees from the Office of the Clerk and other court units to give students an opportunity to apply what they learn in the classroom to the workplace.
<http://www.ce9.uscourts.gov/pico/pico530.nsf/834468cf608231b488256b11005e0a18/a790584ddfb4f6ec88257114006a49ef?OpenDocument>
- The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California held an innovative “Law Day” program that reached over 400 high school students. Held in San Francisco and Oakland, the Law Day program showed the students a documentary that chronicled the life of a San Francisco federal judge.
<http://www.ce9.uscourts.gov/pico/pico530.nsf/834468cf608231b488256b11005e0a18/a1c67df4bcbe20028825719400799137?OpenDocument>
- The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California invited hundreds of high school students to participate in mock trials as part of the “Open Doors to the Federal Courts” program. Students in Sacramento, Fresno, and Bakersfield were assigned various roles, including jury panelists, and participated in a mock trial focused on a fictional case involving a group of teens pulled over for speeding and are caught with alcohol and marijuana in the car.
<http://www.ce9.uscourts.gov/pico/pico530.nsf/834468cf608231b488256b11005e0a18/2d6221429dc73cff8825712c007a8bd4?OpenDocument>

- Los Angeles County Superior Court has a “Courthouse Seminar” program that invites 12th grade government teachers to visit a local courthouse for a one-day orientation. Teachers are provided curriculum materials and take the lesson back to their 12th grade classes.
<http://www.lasuperiorcourt.org/outreach/main.htm#1>
- San Joaquin County Superior Court ran a “Court Community Leadership and Liaison Program” that trained representatives from the ethnic, immigrant, and disabled communities in the county to serve as active liaisons between the court and their communities. The program included a seventeen-session curriculum that trained community members to be able to answer questions on the justice system.
http://www.stocktoncourt.org/courts/news/news_2001-09-19b.htm
- Santa Clara County Superior Court has created a “Court Community Academy and Liaison Program” that offers extensive training to community volunteers in order to better serve persons in all communities with the legal process. The program offers two three-month long sessions to train community leaders.
<http://www.sccsuperiorcourt.org/news/PDFs/CCALPBroc06.pdf>
- Sutter County Superior Court has a program called “Rollercoasters.” The program is a curriculum designed for children ages five to twelve who have experienced a “Rollercoaster” of change in their family due to separation, divorce, or re-marriage.
<http://www.suttercourts.com/index.asp?webfile=resourcesrollercoasters>

Public Awareness Programs

- Ventura County Superior Court created a “Tip of the Day” radio program. The program of Spanish-language public service radio announcements is intended to provide general information to the community while also informing citizens of the wide range of services and programs offered by the court.
<http://www.ventura.courts.ca.gov/venturaMasterFrames13.htm>
- Inyo County Superior Court held a “Bully-Violence Prevention Conference” aimed at bringing together members of the community to address violence in schools.
<http://www.inyocourt.ca.gov/CPC-107.pdf>

Self-Help

- Amador County Superior Court provides a “Family Law Facilitator Program” that offers individual appointments and divorce clinics, at no cost, to assist people with family law issues.
<http://www.amadorcourt.org/self/flf.html>
- Fresno County Superior Court runs a Spanish Self-Help Program called “Centro de Recursos Legales.” Designed for the under-served Spanish population in Fresno County, the center provides pro per litigants with education and access to the court including “how-to” clinics.
http://www.fresnosuperiorcourt.org/general_info/award_winning.php#sshc

Speakers Bureaus

- Alameda County Superior Court offers a “Bench-Bar Speakers Bureau” in which they link teachers to speakers from the legal field for classroom presentations throughout

the school year, at no cost. In 2004-05, the Court provided more than 100 presentations or court tours, reaching approximately 2500 students.
<http://www.alameda.courts.ca.gov/courts/superior/ComFocus/bbsb.pdf>

- Los Angeles County Superior Court has a “Judges’ Speakers Bureau” that provides an opportunity for judges and commissioners to make presentations at public functions. These include chamber of commerce meetings, service clubs and organizations, community action groups, and schools.
<http://www.lasuperiorcourt.org/outreach/main.htm#2>
- Riverside County Superior Court has formed a “Speakers Bureau” that provides speakers for meetings, events, and schools.
<http://www.courts.co.riverside.ca.us/speakersbureau.htm>
- San Luis Obispo County Superior Court offers a “CourtTalk Speakers Bureau.” Judges and other judicial officers, court employees, and District Attorneys give presentations to classes or other interested groups.
<http://www.slocourts.net/info/docs/webinfo.pdf>
- Santa Clara County Superior Court recently formed a “Superior Court Speakers Bureau” designed to promote interaction between judicial officers and the public. The program provides judges and court commissioners to speak at community events, meetings, and school functions.
<http://www.sccsuperiorcourt.org/news/PDFs/NRSpeakers.pdf>

Volunteer Programs

- Ventura County Superior Court has “Volunteer Placement Opportunities” for individuals who wish to learn more about the Justice System and at the same time make a significant contribution to their community.
<http://www.ventura.courts.ca.gov/volunteer.htm>
- 41 of the 58 counties in California have Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs. CASA volunteers are trained volunteers from the community who are appointed by a judge to speak for a child that has been removed from home and made a dependant of the juvenile court. The link below to Del Norte County Superior Court’s program provides an example.
<http://www.casadn.org/about.cfm>

Court Tours

- Alameda County Superior Court offers court tours any day with a two-week prior appointment. Activities include court tours led by attorneys and court staff, courtroom observations, and classroom presentations from judicial officers and attorneys.
<http://www.alameda.courts.ca.gov/courts/superior/ComFocus/bbsb.pdf>
- San Luis Obispo Superior Court offers a Court Visit Program for the SLO Courthouse. Designed for 4th – 12th graders and adult groups, the 1.5 – 2.5 hour tour includes a guided tour of the court, watching a trial, and presentations by judicial officers.
<http://www.slocourts.net/info/docs/webinfo.pdf>

- Santa Barbara Superior Court has free tours daily, except on Sundays. The program has time slots set daily at 2pm and at 10:30 am three times a week.
http://www.sbcourts.org/special_programs/comm_outreach.htm

Examples of Public Education Efforts Across the Nation

- The National Center for State Courts has a website that lists similar community outreach programs throughout the nation:
http://www.ncsconline.org/projects_initiatives/ptc/publicunderstand.htm

If you are aware of any court program that should be included in the above compilation, please contact the Office of Communications at the Administrative Office of the Court (AOC). Email: Pubinfo@jud.ca.gov.